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THE SCULPTURES OF THE PARTHENON.

(Translated for THE CRAYON from "THE TORSEO," by ADOLF STARR.)
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WE behold at length this wondrous structure, which soars above every other temple of Hellas as Homer's poem soars over the epics of past generations. Ascending slowly the Propylæa, the temple, rising from the summit of the Acropolis, unfolds itself before our eyes. The gate before us is that of the western front; but it is not a passage into the temple; the only entrance is on the east, owing to a religious regulation, which ordained that the statue of the divinity must be seen by the worshippers as they cross the threshold of the temple facing the east.

The Grecian temple was intended by the children of Hellas as an offering to their god, and no effort was spared to make the building worthy of the god's acceptance. The substructure was accordingly laid out in the most skillful and beautiful manner. The Parthenon substructure with its majestic steps, resembled an altar, and consisted of a platform 227 feet in length and 101 feet in breadth, supporting the cella, which is the oblong central part of the temple. The Parthenon was erected on the site of the older temple of Athena, burned during the Persian invasion, and which was known as the Hecatompedon, owing to its having been one hundred feet in one of its chief dimensions; the vestiges of the ancient temple are still to be found beneath the substructure of the Parthenon. The cella is surrounded on all sides by a peristyle of Doric pillars, forty-six in number, eight at each end and seventeen at each side (reckoning the corner pillars twice). From the pillars which surrounded it on all sides, the Parthenon was technically called by the Grecian architects a Peripteros or a structure with wings. The spacious, airy, luminous, bateous halls, hovering majestically round the solemn sanctuary of the temple, thus impressed the vivid imagination of the Grecian. And this name was fully borne out by the glorious aspect of the building, which lifted up its arms towards heaven, as if carried along by the spell of a genius, which knew how to subdue the ponderous mysteries of matter, and to make them subservient to the law of unity and harmony, that the building was intended to symbolize. This law, which has become known only to the scientific world of our day after thousands of years of investigation, was familiar to the ancient masters, Phidias and Ictinus, through the grasp of their fine intuition. Intuitions enabled the constructors of the Parthenon to avoid the use of the straight horizontal line. We find this even in the *stylobate*, or the substructure, which was not built horizontally, but formed a curve at the two extreme ends, although it was imperceptible, being visible only to surveyors. Nor were the columns perpendicular; the capitals or heads of the columns were inclined

one inch and a half at the upper ends towards the external walls of the cella; the cella presenting a like inclination of $\frac{1}{128}$ metres in the same direction. This system was perceptible all over the structure, which presented not one single perpendicular line. The peculiar heaviness which perpendicular lines give to structures of this kind were thus happily avoided, inasmuch as we find the curve extending over all the lines of the building; there was no pedantic monotony, but a gentle architectural grace, derived from the all-pervading, although imperceptible swelling lines thus apparent in the construction of the temple. Hence the impression of serenity and majesty which Winckelmann defines as being the organic spirit of Grecian Art. So great, indeed, was the charm, that Plutarch exclaimed at the sight of the Parthenon, half a century after the completion of the temple:

"The immortal beauty which presided over the conception of this majestic design continues to clothe the temple with a thousand graces. It seems to have been endowed with the perennial freshness of eternal youth, and yet five centuries have gone by since it was built. It is this atmosphere of perpetual youth and beauty that surrounds the Parthenon, and protects it from the inroads of time."

The columns of the Parthenon, with the capitals, are about thirty-four feet high, and are embellished with twenty flutings. They are mainly composed of twelve drums, which are joined together so skillfully that even to this day the columns seem, from a little distance, to be made of one block of marble. The diameter of the columns is 6 feet 2 inches at the base, and they are placed 6 feet 4 inches apart, wide enough to produce a sense of freedom and space, and at the same time sufficiently close, to give to each column the character of a distinct work of Art. In the older Doric temples, the columns are too close together, while during the decline of architecture they were too wide apart, imparting, in the former case, impressions of the beautiful, and producing in the latter instance a sense of meagerness. Both extremes are happily avoided in the columns of the Parthenon. Let it not be imagined, however, that the Partheon was a peculiar colossal work of architecture; it measured only 65 feet in height from the base to the gallery; the length was 227 feet; its impression of grandeur was not produced by height, but by a soaring sense of boundless dimensions, which absorbs thought far more than labyrinth-like tortuosities and complications, that cannot be grappled by the understanding. Says Curtius (see his work on the Acropolis, p. 19): "Although the building was distinguished by the most charming simplicity, it possessed at the same time higher qualities than those produced by a graceful variety in form and by a matchless harmony of proportion. It possessed the elements of a deeper and more solemn char-

"acter; the sister Arts were pressed into the service of architecture, in order to reveal this character, in order to express this meaning. Architecture, acting as a sovereign queen, opens the wide portals of her palace with regal prodigality; sculpture and the art of painting enter, availing themselves of the proffered hospitality; but expressing their sense of gratitude for it, by leaving statues and images behind them, making the works of the architect aglow with life and beauty, by scattering in a thousand forms the 'human face divine' among lifeless piles of stone."

The Parthenon, as we have already stated, was a great national sanctuary. It was the result of the grand conceptions of the noblest of all nations; it originated during the most brilliant period of her history, when Hellas had reached the zenith of civilization and power, when the intuitive love of the people for beauty and genius was encouraged and stimulated by the inspiring influences of the choicest and wisest spirits of the land. All the remarkable acquirements and graces of the national mind were reflected in the embellishment of the Parthenon. *The works of Art which decorated the external part of the temple were, in fact, embodiments and pictorial illustrations of Attic religion and of Attic life, during the most momentous period of the national history.*

In Doric temple architecture we find the three following parts of the building chiefly containing the embellishments spoken of above: 1st. The tympana of the pediment. 2d. The so-called metopes in the frieze of the entablature. 3d. The frieze running along the top of the external wall of the cella, under the ceiling of the peristyle. The first and last named parts may be easily identified, but the metopes require additional explanation.

It must be borne in mind that the laws and circumstances which controlled the erection of the Grecian temples made it indispensable that wood should be the first building material. Thus all the oldest Grecian temples, of which descriptions have come down to us, were built of wood. In the remote period of architecture we find the cross-beams, or main beams, projecting their ends (or heads) over the architrave, or lowest and chief beam, which, in its turn, rested immediately on the columns; the cross-beams supported the cornice and the roof of the building. The projecting ends were cut off at a later period, and for the sake of improving the appearance, as reported by the Roman architect Vitruvius, "planks of the form of triglyphs were nailed in the place of the former projection, and painted over with blue wax colors, so as to palliate the unfavorable effect of the mutilated ends." Hence the origin in Doric structures of the square spaces between the projections, or, in other words, the metopes between the triglyphs, as they are called. At first the metopes consisted of open squares, and were intended as a repository of tridents and other offerings and sacred vessels. When stone came into use for building material, the metopes were filled with squares of stones or marble, which formed such

a bold contrast to the more brilliant parts of the building, that the good taste of the Grecians caused squares to be filled with sculptures and other works of Art. The name of *metopes*, first intended only to designate the square spaces, was afterwards applied to the works of Art themselves, which were placed there.

We will now proceed to examine the external ornaments of the Parthenon. The two cardinal articles of the Attic creed consisted in the belief in the birth of Athena from the head of Jupiter, and in her wrestling from the ruler of the sea, Poseidon (Neptune), the land of Attica and the worship of its inhabitants. These two cardinal articles of religious creed, the birth of Athena and her contest with Poseidon, were represented on the tympana of the pediment in rich groups of forty-six to forty-eight detached colossal statues from two to eleven feet high. Thus the first work of Art, that arrested the attention of the Athenian as the procession reached the Acropolis, represented the two articles of faith which were most endeared to his religious condition, and which held a foremost place in the national traditions and the national heart; these hallowed representations, moreover, were the product of the genius of Athens' most illustrious artist. As the members of the procession approached the eastern entrance of the Acropolis, the soaring pediment unfolded before their wondering eyes a majestic group, instinct with world-wide interest. Zeus appeared as the central figure. The Olympian god sat upon his throne, between morning and evening, between the rising and the setting of the sun, between day and night, between the beginning and the end of all things; he was surrounded by the three Horæ; Mæræ, the goddesses of fate; Tyche, the goddess of fortune; Aphrodite Urania and Eileithyia, Hephæstus and Prometheus, Ares and Hermes; all seated around their master. But nearest to him stood she who sprung from his head—Pallas Athena. Proud and regal was the bearing of the goddess, as she stood there in a brilliant array of lustrous armor, and like a fiery blaze of dazzling light. Fervent was the enthusiasm, and vehement the joy of the surrounding gods and goddesses as they beheld the luminous and hallowed vision.

On the left, at the extreme end of the gable, Apollo and the fiery steeds rise from the surging waves; on the opposite side Selene plunges with her chariot into the roaring billows. The sunny gods of Hellas hail with radiant-brow the advent of the day; the sombre oriental deity of the moon, and the terrors of the night, are conveyed to the floods of the deep. Grecian civilization breaks upon the world. Oriental barbarism disappears. Intellect begins to diffuse her blessings. The blighting curse of ignorance is forced to retreat. The mummeries of besotted priests shall no longer be allowed to smother the god in man. Rejoice, sing allelujahs, children of men! A new era of progress and happiness dawns upon the race. Ignorance, superstition, tyranny, brutality, and all the countless sufferings which follow in the train of barbarism, cease to impede the

free development of man's innate divinity. A new religion dawns upon mankind. A religion of love, of civilization, of humanity! A lovely and stately maiden is the standard-bearer of the new faith. Pallas Athena is the name of this wonderful maiden. She who sprung from the head of Zeus. She is the apostle of the new dispensation. She is the goddess of light, the goddess of thought, the goddess of ideas, the goddess of Art, the goddess of world-blessing, knowledge, beneficence, and wisdom. Great, indeed, were the inspiring emotions which thrilled the Athenian's heart, which made his proud breast swell with joy, as he gazed and gazed with increasing reverence and adoration upon the luminous maiden of the Parthenon.

The eastern gable was then dedicated to the celebration of the birth of the goddess, and the western gable, with its mighty group of sculptures, was consecrated to the glorification of the land, for the possession of which she fought with Poseidon. The gods resolved that whichever of the two should bring forth a gift most blissful to mortals, should have possession of the land. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, and lo! a horse appeared. But Athena, with more gentle intuitions, planted the olive. The gods thereupon decreed that the olive was more useful to men than the horse. The contest is over. Athena is triumphant. The victory is hers, and the gods give the city to Athena, from whom the city takes its name. In the centre of the gable stood on one side the holy olive tree; and Athena, turning with exulting joy towards her chariot, which was escorted by Erichthonius, while Nike, the goddess of victory, guided the horses. On the other side stood Poseidon, crestfallen and sorrowful, stepping towards his chariot, which was escorted by Leucothea, the marine goddess, while the horses were guided by Amphitrite. The local divinities of Attica, the umpires in the contest of Athena and Poseidon, were grouped on both sides in a most suggestive and graceful manner. On Athena's side, towards the corner nearest to her chariot, we behold the most ancient tutelary hero of Hellas, who was said to have been the founder and the first king of Athens, Cecrops, with his wife and her four daughters, Agraules, Herse, Erysichthon, and Pandrosos. In the gable corner itself we see, stretched on his seat, the splendid figure of the Attic river god, Ilissus, which continues at the present day to be considered one of the grandest achievements of the sculptors of antiquity. On Poseidon's side, and in the rear of the chariot, we behold the august form of mother earth, the all-producing and all-nourishing mother, Gaia Curotrophos, carrying her children in her arms. Next to her is the famous group of Thalassa, the personification of the sea, with Aphrodite, to whom she gave birth. Behind Thalassa stands Galene, the lovely goddess of the calm sea. At the end of the gable, we find the river god Cephissus, with his consort Diogeneia and Callirrhoe, the nymph of the springs. The representation of the birth of Athena comes before us under an atmosphere of serene and august repose, while that of her contest with Poseidon conveys a scene of strife

and animation. The genius of the artists of Hellas excelled in the graphic delineation of real picturesque contrasts. The same graphic power pervades all the other gable groups, of which descriptions have come down to us.*

Besides the splendid works which we have described, other incidents connected with Athena's life were represented in ninety-two metopes, placed over the frieze of the entablature, fourteen on each front, and thirty-two on each side, the former commemorating the deeds of Athena, and of her favorite heroes, Theseus and Hercules, while twenty-three of the latter represented incidents of the battles with the Centaurs, indicative of the struggle between the ancient and new creeds; the remaining nine metopes were devoted to subjects connected with the triumphant new mythology. Here might have been seen the monuments dedicated to the Brauronian Artemis, to the Thesmophoria, to the instruction of the priests of Athena, and the religious service connected therewith, and to the fate of the Agraulides, the relatives of Cecrops. Erichthonius, the foster-child of Athena, and the father of Cecrops, is represented in the act of consecrating the oldest heaven-sent holy image of the goddess in the sanctuary of the ancient acropolis. He is further represented in deadly combat with Eumolpus, the Eleusinian, and son of Poseidon, while in another metope he is represented as a pupil of Athena in horsemanship. Two other metopes represented Pandora, with Epimetheus and Triptolemus, the favorite of Demeter (Ceres) by whom he was instructed in agricultural pursuits.

The thirty-two metopes, to which we have referred above (more than twenty of which perished on the voyage to England), represented battles of the Lapithæ, the Centaurs, the Amazons, and exploits of the horse-guiding goddess, and of her favorite heroes, Perseus and Bellerophon. The fourteen metopes, which we have also mentioned before, begin to deal with historical subjects. We find here scenes of the first great battle, which, under the auspices of Athena, was fought by the Athenians at Marathon, against the Persians. There we find, upon the same gable, the representation of different exploits of the goddess, which, however distinct in character, were all equally beneficial in results. The olive tree, planted by her as a symbol of peace, appears upon one and the same side, with the picture of the conflicts which resulted from war. In this manner were remote traditions brought into connection with the recent facts of history, and while the metopes proclaimed the moral and intellectual influence of Athena, the splendid bronze shields which were exhibited as trophies of victory on the great architrave beams over the columns, bore witness to the martial and political power of the land.

The mythology and history of Hellas having received ample justice, Phidias next paid homage to the people by representing on a frieze which ran along the top of the

* See Welcker's *Ancient Monuments*, vol. i., p. 171. See also Brunn's *History of Grecian Artists*, vol. i., pp. 245, 248.

external wall of the cella, under the ceiling of the peristyle, the Panathenaic procession itself. Here the whole festive occasion was pictured with graphic power. The fair maidens and proud youths of Athens, men of all ages and conditions—pedestrians, cavaliers, and the brilliant array of chariots and carriages—all were represented there, all instinct with joy and full of excitement and emotion, dedicating to the gods rich offerings and gifts, and approaching the sacred sanctuary of the acropolis, armed with the symbols of faith, and, what was still better, with a soul penetrated with enthusiastic gratitude and adoration. This monument of the procession measured four hundred and eighty feet in length, and covered the whole four sides of the cella. The most beautiful characteristics of Attic character and life were here represented, under the brilliant auspices of the divine art of Phidias, and the impression produced by it was full of almost indescribable charms. We will borrow Curtius's description of it :

"On the western side appears a group of spirited youths of Attica, exercising their horses, and trying to tame their fiery steeds' ardor, as the order of the procession cannot brook so much haste. Another group is not entirely ready yet for the procession ; its figures are busy in putting on the armor or the festive garb, and in making arrangements about the horses. The picturesqueness of this part of the marbles possesses immense attractions. The confusion, bustle, excitement, animation, and all-pervading movement and activity of the scene, is most exquisitely represented. Next we have, in two parallel processions, the members of the festival, who are already drawn up in regular order, and moving in an easterly direction. Those on horseback are in the rear of the war-chariots, which contain the victors of the preceding festivals, who are escorted by heralds ; or sometimes they mount and dismount again, following for a time on foot, in order to give evidence of their superior skill and vigor. At the head of the members on horseback appear, in an attitude full of decorum and dignity, a legion of elderly females and men, and, nearest to the easterly corner, comes the sacerdotal part of the procession, chiefly composed of musicians, while the men who have the sacrificial animals under their charge, are seen running hither and thither between the musicians, watching, with Argus eyes and anxious mien, the objects of their trust. On the eastern side, at last, we find the female element of the procession ; the maidens of Attica appear at this stage of the proceedings, carrying the sacred vessels, with down-cast looks, apparelled in long drapery, and escorted by the daughters of the free commoners, who assist them in holding umbrellas. Priests and priestesses surrender the sacrificial gifts to select boys and girls, and seem to be explaining the hallowed character of the occasion."

In the centre of the whole group, on the eastern entrances, the congregated gods of the acropolis are repre-

sented in stupendous statues, of supernatural size, and in sitting posture. They do the honors to the masses of the procession, which pour in from both sides of the temple, to escort them, as it were, over the marble threshold of the temple, and to introduce them to the august goddess herself, who is enthroned there in the canopy of gold and ivory, prepared for her by the genius of Phidias, and who now condescends to receive the homage of her people. Marvellous were the impressions produced by the goddess. The sun glowed upon the statue in golden rays, through the semi-open ceiling of the temple ; the sight of the sacred altar, and, in the rear of the goddess, the treasury of the temple, of which she was the keeper, all this lent peculiar charm and majesty to the virgin goddess, as she stood in her virgin-home, the Parthenon. The citizen of Athens might well give himself up to the most enthusiastic admiration, and exclaim with the poet :

Nimmer wird Eos Reicheres schauen
Und nicht Göttlicheres !

To comprehend this enthusiasm, we must call before our imagination, not the faded and monotonous colors of our northern architecture, but the rich and gorgeous colors of Grecian art, and the still more luxuriant colors of the Grecian skies. The gold and ivory of the statues, the embellishment of the walls, the beautiful ornaments on the friezes, of the triglyphs, of the metopes, and all the thousand fairy-like art treasures of the temple, received a new life and a new fascination from the glowing reflection of the sun, and of the general beauty of nature in Greece. Indeed, nature seems to have supplied Attica with such remarkable marble, in order to give to the sun a worthy aim for his light, and to the artists a worthy material for their conceptions. The effect which the sun has upon the Parthenon is as marvellous at the present day as it was at the time of Phidias. The Parthenon may still be likened, when bathed by the rays of the sun, to a mighty rose and gold-colored fire, which rises from a dark background, sending its flames towards heaven. The German traveller, Bröndstedt (vol. ii. pp. 145, 158), describes it as a great fire, kindled in past and memorable and splendid periods, which continues to retain its glow, to burn on slowly and quietly after the lapse of ages, and for all time to come.

An accurate delineation of the mental properties of almost any one would include some traits never before presented, or never in the same combination ; and his biography would no doubt be deeply interesting if it fell into competent hands. The question is not so much, who is the subject ? as, what are the qualifications of the writer ? It is noted in Hazlitt's *Conversations of Northcote*, that there is something in the meaneast countenance which a skillful artist can turn to advantage. Certainly the most dramatic sketches in the productions of Scott and Crabbe are usually taken from the lower or familiar ranks of life, which are often conceived to be least fertile in remarkable personages. It is only weakness of penetration which makes the number of originals appear small.—*Chilton*.